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Blackwells Isl -

BOARD OF

ASSISTANT ALDERMEN,

JULY 22, 1835.

Report of the Joint Special Committee on Blackwell's Island
and the Long Island Farms, on the Communication from
the Commissioners of the Alms House, relating to the
Lunatic Asylum.

Laid on the table and ordered to be printed.

Wm. HAGADORN, Clerk.

To the Hon. the Board of Assistant Aldermen of the City of
New-York.
GENTLEMEN,

The Board of Commissioners of the Alms
House and Bridewell, to whom is entrusted the erection of
the Lunatic Asylum, on Blackwell's Island, beg leave to
communicate to your honourable body, that on mature re-
flection, they are convinced that the location of the building
now erected is not a good one, and that the expense of its

New York City Law. Augt.

completion would amount to a sum greater than they would feel warranted in expending without further advice from your Board. In consequence they have caused the works to be stopped, and respectfully request further direction on the subject from your Honourable Body.

I have the honour to be,

Gentlemen, with great respect,

Your obedient servant,

JOHN TARGEE, } *Chairman of the
Board of
Commissioners.*

New-York, June 29th, 1835.

The Joint Special Committee on Blackwell's Island, and the Long Island Farms, to whom was referred the preceding communication from the Board of Commissioners of the Alms House, dated June 29th, 1835,

RESPECTFULLY REPORT:

That the Commissioners state, that the erection of a Lunatic Asylum, on Blackwell's Island, is entrusted to them; that on mature reflection they are convinced that the location of the Building now erecting is not a good one, and that the expense of its completion would amount to a sum greater than they would feel warranted in expending without further advice from the Board, and that in consequence they have caused the works to be stopped, and request further direction on the subject from this Board.

The Joint Special Committee have more than once visited Blackwell's Island, and very particularly examined said Is-

land, and especially the location directed by the last Common Council for said Lunatic Asylum, and having a wish to be informed under what Ordinances of the Common Council the said Commissioners of the Alms House, supposed themselves empowered or justified in stopping the progress of a building which they were by the Common Council entrusted to erect, a respectful note was addressed to them on the 8th July 1835, asking for such information, and on the 10th of July, the said Commissioners were pleased to reply, that as conservators of the public property placed under their control, they considered it their duty to make a communication to the Board of Assistant Aldermen, in relation to the Lunatic Asylum, commenced on Blackwell's Island, and entrusted to their supervision.

The History of this building is as follows:—on the 24th of June, 1833, the Commissioners of the Alms House sent a communication to the Common Council suggesting the propriety of removing the Lunatic Asylum to Blackwell's Island, which was read and referred to a Special Committee on Blackwell's Island.

On the 30th of Sept, 1833, that Committee reported, recommending an appropriation of \$150 to procure plans, &c.

On the 17th of Feb. 1834, the Special Joint Committee on Blackwell's Island, and Long Island Farms, consisting of Messrs. Dunshee, Palmer, Robertson, Allen, Labagh and Jacobus, made a report to the Board of Aldermen (Doc. No. 93), recommending a plan which they had adopted, and that \$10,000 be appropriated to carry this plan into effect, which was agreed to on the 2nd April, 1834, with an amendment reducing the appropriation to \$3,000, and then both plan and amount were agreed to by both Boards, and the building located on the upper end of Blackwell's Island, and a few days thereafter devoted to removing some of the earth.

In May, 1834, the two new Boards of the Common Council organized the said Joint Special Committee, by the ap-

pointment of Messrs. Labagh, Tucker, Cornell, Smith, Purdy and Johnson, and on the 5th Jan. 1835, the said Committee reported to the Board of Assistant Aldermen, that part of a report from the Commissioners of the Alms House, had been referred to them on the 6th Oct. preceding, relating to the modification of the plan of a building about being erected on Blackwell's Island, for a Lunatic Asylum. That the resolution of the Board of Aldermen, required them to revise the acts of their predecessors, that they had been put in possession of matters in relation to Lunatic Asylums, which were not within the reach of their predecessors, and were not considered by them, that nothing had been done towards the erection of the buildings beyond the preparation of a drawing of one floor and of the elevation of the building, neither of which would be of any use as working drawings. That they had several objections to the plan of their predecessors when applied to the designed location of one to be built for the City of New-York, and they selected another plan, submitted it to the examination and opinion of the Commissioners of the Alms House, and they united with the said Joint Special Committee in recommending its approval and adoption by the Common Council. Whereupon it was finally resolved by both Boards, and approved by the Mayor, that the general plan of an edifice for a Lunatic Asylum, be erected on Blackwell's Island, described in the before mentioned report, and accompanying drawings.

That a building upon said general plans, with such particular exterior and interior details, arrangements and conveniences, as are expedient, or are required for the comfort, and treatment of insane patients, be erected in the place, and stead, of one heretofore adopted by the Common Council.

That the commissioners of the alms-house, under the supervision of the joint special committee on Blackwell's Isl-

and and the Long Island Farms, proceed to the erection of the centre Building, one of the front wings, one of the east and west wings and the octagonal inspection Buildings at the angle formed by the said wings.

In pursuance of a pledge given in their last report, the committee proceeded to settle the details more fully, and caused the necessary and proper working drawings to be prepared, and on the 20th April, 1835, laid the same before the Board of Aldermen—they were finally adopted and approved by the Mayor in the following words:—

Resolved, That the sum of \$20,000 be, and the same is hereby appropriated for building the lunatic asylum, and that the comptroller pay the same on the requisition of the commissioners of the alms house.

Resolved, That the details for the edifice of the proposed lunatic asylum, as in the foregoing report and accompanying drawing described, be and is hereby adopted.

The buildings had been commenced previous to the last mentioned Resolutions.

A short time previous to the organization of the present Common Council, his Honor the Mayor, accompanied by and in the presence of the old and new Corporation, laid the corner stone of the Lunatic Asylum—the intended north wing was fast rising, when a change was made in the commissioners of the alms house—very soon after the present commissioners received their appointment, they stopped the work, and on the 29th June made the communication above referred to, giving notice thereof to the Board of Assistants.

Concerning the plan of the lunatic asylum, the joint special committee upon mature and very particular examination of all the previous proceedings thereon, and the reports and reasons that led to the adoption of the present one, are unani-

mously of the opinion, that the one adopted by the last Corporation should be preferred. The committee forbear giving any reasons in addition to those set forth in Doc. No. 38 of Assistant Aldermen of 1835, and Doc. No. 54 of the Board of Aldermen of the same year.

Upon the subject of the present location of the Lunatic Asylum, several considerations claim and have received the attention and examination of the Joint Special Committee; the first of these is, that nearly \$3,000 have been expended on the foundation and basement story of the north wing of the building, and the walls thus far laid, are finished in a workman-like manner; but it is alleged, and truly, that should the whole Lunatic Asylum be put up on the ground marked out for it, a considerable quantity of stone would be covered by the same. The Committee are not aware, that the Island was purchased by the city, with the intention of speculating by the sale of building-stone, beyond what might be prepared for sale by the labour of the convicts; if this should be the case, the Committee are of opinion, that should no change of location be adopted, there will still be quarry sufficient belonging to the city, to occupy the convicts, under proper regulations, for a great number of years to come, for it will not be overlooked that the city possesses vast bodies of stone, and some of very good quality upon the Island of New-York, and some of unsurpassed goodness on Randall's Island, besides the remainder of Blackwell's Island; and it may become a subject worthy of the very serious consideration of the Common Council, whether certain descriptions of convicts may not be properly and advantageously employed, from year to year, on some of the rocky and difficult avenues and streets of the city, and among the many reasons that may be urged for such a measure, one may be, that the price of stone may be so low, that it may not be profitable to the city, that the convicts

should continue the quarrying of them on Blackwell's Island, in consequence of the opening of very extensive and excellent quarries in the Bergen hills of New Jersey, also at Yonkers, and near King's Bridge, as well as at Morrisiana, and many other places near this city.

But the Committee would respectfully state that the interests of the city demand, that the elevation of Blackwell's Island wherever any public building is to be erected, should be preserved, instead of levelling it with the surrounding river, or covering it with pits that must be filled up, or prove sources of disease to all dwellers upon the Island. The form of the Island was one great inducement to placing the Asylum where it is : it was there located by the last Common Council, and the Committee believe that was a sufficient reason for such procedure. It was intended by the Corporation of 1833-4, to have located the Asylum, then in contemplation, north of the present site, on the very extreme point of the Island ; this would have required expensive preparations of the ground, a great proportion of which is a salt marsh, covered at high tide by the water ; moreover, the *neighborhood* of the Asylum, in such a case, would not have been a good one for many reasons. It would not be so healthy, nor in any respect so pleasant to the objects of our charity ; the building could not have been so permanent, and the surrounding ground *indispensable* to the Asylum, would have been insufficient, and many provisions intended to be carried into effect, by the present plan, would have been impracticable ; the Committee, therefore, *unanimously* recommend that the present location of the Lunatic Asylum should in all respects be preserved.

The subject of the early completion of the part of the Asylum already commenced, has received the consideration of the Committee, and on this point they deem it their duty to state that, through the politeness of Dr. Van Hovenburgh, they have ascertained the following facts:—that the whole number

of lunatics at Bellevue is 131—and that the city have twenty placed for the present, in the Asylum near *Manhattanville*; that of those at Bellevue, about 15 males and 25 females, are noisy, violent, &c., about 8 males and 10 females, are idiotic, filthy, &c.; many require very great attention, several will not eat, unless compelled. The crowded state of the Asylum at Bellevue is such, that in the female department, in the place between the cells and the hall of the basement story, the superintendents are compelled to lay two tier of beds for the lodging of female lunatics, the consequence is, that during the night the officer whose duty it is to attend to it, is obliged to go to that part of the building, and separate some of those lunatics who become boisterous. The general crowded condition of the Asylum, must render the whole establishment unhealthy. Doctor Van Hovenburgh further states, that at present it is impossible to classify the lunatics for want of room, and therefore, the measures necessary for the cure of lunatics cannot now be adopted, and that moral treatment is nearly all that is practicable at present. That preparations are making to place some of the lunatics in a building on Blackwell's Island, and that the arrangement of the present Asylum (having been originally built for a fever hospital) is such, that although most of the cells are white-washed every morning, a visit to them is extremely disagreeable.

Whereupon, the Joint Special Committee unanimously recommend to the Common Council the adoption of the following

RESOLUTION :

Resolved, That the Commissioners of the Alms-House be, and they are hereby directed, to proceed with the erection of that part of the building lately commenced, on Blackwell's Island, known as the Lunatic Asylum, with all con-